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CRATER HEALTH DISTRICT PROMOTES PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE ADOLESCENT HEALTH

Celebrate National Health Education Week October 15-19th

(Petersburg, VA) - The time to focus on the health of our youth is now. There has never been a greater need to improve the health of our nation's young people than right now. Leading causes of adolescent death and disability are related to preventable health risk behaviors including, tobacco use, unhealthy dietary behaviors, sedentary lifestyles, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, unsafe sex, injury and violence.

Improving the health and future of youth is the focus for National Health Education Week (NHEW) 2012. During October 15-19, health education specialists and public health advocates across the country will work to raise awareness of adolescent health issues and empower young people to make informed decisions that support healthy development through activities supporting this year's theme, "Adolescent Health: Planting Seeds for a Healthier Generation." Establishing a healthy start in life improves a young person's likelihood of becoming a healthy adult, and reduces the risk for chronic and non-chronic conditions. It is well known that behaviors established during childhood are linked to adult health outcomes such as heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, and obesity. These health conditions and behaviors such as smoking and drug use account for a major portion of preventable chronic diseases that costs the U.S. economy more than \$1 trillion in medical spending annually.

To improve the health of our youth, the Crater Health District (CHD) provides a number of services. Our youth can gain information about their health through *HealthSpace*, a community-based program, which focuses on providing educational outreach to youth aged 13-19 years old. The HealthSpace health educator and clinic nurse counsels teens regarding; healthy relationships, self-esteem, career counseling, hygiene, and reproductive health. This program also provides a variety of clinical services.

Crater has partnerships with a number of organizations that are working diligently towards improving adolescent health through multiple programs and services. Those partnerships and programs include; the *HealthSpace* Teen Clinic funded by The Cameron Foundation and *Resource Mothers* funded by the John Randolph Foundation. We also work closely with coalition partners and the community through the Coalition Against Alcohol, Nicotine & Drug Under-Age Use (CAAN-DUU) and the Abstinence Education Program. Through a recently awarded Tobacco Use Control Project Grant, Crater has provided training to community organizations which serve youth to conduct Project Store ALERT. This project focuses on showing youth how tobacco is marketed to them.

“In order to provide comprehensive and accessible health programming for our adolescents, it is imperative that we strengthen our partnerships and collaborations between school and youth programs,” emphasizes, Alton Hart, Jr., MD, MPH, Director of the Crater Health District.

One of the best ways to improve adolescent health is through school and youth programs. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, schools have more influence on the lives of young people than any other social institution, except for the family. Schools provide critical outlets to reach millions of adolescents and provide a place to strengthen a student’s ability to successfully practice and adopt behaviors that protect and promote health and avoid or reduce health risks. Thus, advocating for significant partnerships and adequate school health education programs is a key way to improve adolescent health today.

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